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Puget Sound Naval Shipyard Building 50 Restoration

Located in the northwest corner of Washington State, bordered by the Olympic mountain range to the west and the Cascade mountain range to the east, is the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard. The Shipyard is situated on Sinclair Inlet, a natural deep water port. The 354 acres of the Shipyard are bordered on three sides by the City of Bremerton in Kitsap County. The City of Seattle is only one hour away by either driving or ferry service. The Shipyard now employees 8,925 civilians and 7,262 military personnel. It is built around six major piers and six large dry docks, and consists of approximately 400 structures.

Originally called Puget Sound Naval Station, the name was changed in 1945 to Puget Sound Naval Shipyard. The Shipyard's principal historic significance was its role as the primary repair facility for damaged battleships and aircraft carriers as well as smaller warships of the Pacific Fleet during World War II. Today, Puget Sound Naval Shipyard contains four historic districts and one National Historic Landmark District.

Officially funded by Congress in 1891 as a dry dock site for naval and commercial purposes, the Shipyard has provided over a century of service in defense of the nation. The decision to establish a shipyard in the Northwest was due in part to the fact that the United States had no dry dock north of San Francisco large enough to accommodate the country's larger commercial sailing vessels and steamships. Often ships in need of repairs had to be sent to the British Columbia Dock Yard at Esquimalt. In 1888, President Grover Cleveland appointed a commission to select a suitable site for a navy yard and dry dock in the Northwest. The commission decided Puget Sound was the most suitable location in the entire region for a navy yard and dry dock. Congress recognized the resulting flight of American money to a foreign port and passed the proposal to establish a dry dock in the Northwest.

By 1896, the first dry dock was completed, along with an administrative building and officers' quarters. A Marine Reservation was established shortly after to provide security. In 1906 a wireless station was established and in 1911 a hospital was built.

Through the years, Puget Sound Naval Shipyard grew. By 1913 a second dry dock was completed, along with numerous buildings and structures. By World War I its mission was expanded and included the development of the capability to construct new ships. Additional dry docks were built, with the fifth finished in 1941. By World War II, the Shipyard was to play a major role in winning the War in the Pacific. It performed major battle repair, modernization, overhaul, and shipbuilding as the only west coast shipyard capable of repairing large ships.

By 1945, the Shipyard's mission changed to the deactivation of the war fleet. Its workload since that time has included conversion of carriers to accommodate jet aircraft and maintenance of the Navy's nuclear powered ships.

Throughout its history, the Shipyard has designed and built structures based on changing technologies and needs. The designs and construction of shipyard buildings were determined mainly by the public works officers. The basic configuration of the Shipyard was firmly established by post-World War I.

Located within the National Historic Landmark District and in the heart of the industrial area of the Shipyard is one of the oldest original buildings of the Shipyard, Building 50, built in 1896. With partial funding provided by the Legacy Resource Management Program* and additional Shipyard resources, Building 50 is being restored and re-utilized.

Building 50 was designed by the Seattle architectural firm of Chamberlain and Siebrand in 1896. It was originally constructed on a hill overlooking the Shipyard for a cost of $7,000. It was the headquarters for the Naval Station during most of the initial period of development (1891–1906) and housed the offices of the Commandant. Five other similar structures were built adjacent to Building 50 for officers quarters, and are still used as quarters today.

In 1911, the building was moved off the hill closer to the main work area of the Shipyard near Dry Dock 2 to be used as a receiving ships office. Over the years, the building had many uses; in 1918 it was the Shipyard's dental office, in 1920 the building was used by the Shipyard chemists,

Building 50 in 1907.

Building 50 in 1995 before restoration.

in 1922 by the Fire Chief and, shortly after that, the Apprentice School was established in the building.

By 1939 the building was moved a short distance to the newly built Dry Dock 5, which is where it remains today.

Working from an old 1907 photograph, the Shipyard's goal was to restore this building to its original appearance as much as possible.

Initially, restoration plans included replacement of all the original siding, as it was thought it would have a better appearance. However, after careful review it was decided only 30% of the original siding really needed replacement since the goal of historic restoration is to maintain as much original material as possible, thus keeping the "historic character" of the building.

Repairs were also made to the columns, which were held in place by a forklift while the bases and plinths were removed and repaired and later reinstalled by the Shipyard carpenters.

At the same time, the original wood windows were removed and rehabilitated. Initial estimates to repair each window ran about $600. However, additional research resulted in retention of an experienced window rehabilitation contractor for approximately $300 for each window.

Next came the demolition of an old concrete security vault built alongside the west wall and used to store encryption machines during the 1940s. Not original to the building, the vault was torn down. While the vault was being removed, a portion of the attached Building 50 wall unexpectedly came down, too. Temporary supports were used to shore up the remainder of the wall until it was rebuilt and the siding was installed. Because the vault covered some of the window openings on the west wall, new windows designed to match the original windows were installed along the lower portion of the new west wall to match the original windows on the top portion.

Today, the renovation is almost complete. The exterior has been repainted the original color of colonial ivory, the stone facing around the foundation has been replaced, and almost all the awnings have been installed.

With Legacy money the Shipyard held a class in historic preservation, including preservation technology for all craftspeople, contracting officials, and other employees involved in the project. While craftspeople worked on Building 50, a video was made of their accomplishments, which will be used to produce a historic preservation training video.

The high cost of building maintenance and Building 50's location within the Shipyard's controlled industrial area sparked discussions in the 1970s to demolish it. The plan never materialized, and the building continued to be used as an office space.

During rehabilitation, the interior was remodeled to provide more administrative space and to include a berthing area for Navy personnel living on old barges during deactivation of their submarines. Part of the interior of the building will provide sleeping quarters, showers, a small kitchen, and additional classrooms upstairs. It is estimated that the money saved will amount to over $1 million a year and, more importantly, that the project will improve the quality of life for these military members.

This project has been unique for the Navy. It is the first and only project that Legacy has funded to actually restore a historic building; all other funding has been for studies. Since this is a "first time" project of this type, the work has been challenging and has provided several tangible benefits.

It has provided historic preservation and craft-skills training to a number of our own craftspeople and established a list of technical resources for the location of materials and expertise within the community.

This rehabilitation project has also brought together the Navy, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Park Service to work in partnership. More important, it has brought heightened awareness of historic preservation to our own employees and through civic displays shown the public a piece of their American heritage.

Note

* In 1991 Congress elevated the stewardship of DoD's natural and cultural resources by enacting a bill to establish and fund the Legacy Resource Management program. Legacy's purpose is to "promote, manage, research, conserve, and restore the priceless biological, geophysical, and historical resources which exist on public lands, facilities, or property held by the Department of Defense."

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Kira Khadem was the Historical Facilities Manager in the Public Works Department of Puget Sound Naval Shipyard for over three years until 1996.

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Land-Use History—Past and Present
A Challenge For the Military Mission

Fort Hunter Liggett (FHL) in southern Monterey County, California preserves a cultural landscape that emerged over thousands of years in a remote and bountiful environment. Hypothesized to extend back in time at least 8,000 to 10,000 years, FHL's rich cultural heritage spans a documented 6,000 years of prehistory. Between the 1769 Spanish exploration of this locale and the War Department's 1940 purchase of area ranch lands, remains of four distinctive historic eras cover the installation. In addition to a long prehistory, typically Californian 18th- and 19th-century Spanish, Mexican, and American settlement imprinted the land.

Presently, all branches of the armed forces take advantage of this isolated terrain for training and both testing and experimentation toward enhanced defense technology. Indeed, meeting training and testing needs is the primary objective at FHL. Action planning, installation development and maintenance, and coordination with regulatory agencies facilitate these goals. United States World War II involvement began a history of "free rein" training over 200,000-plus acres. Legislation and public concern eventually challenged to integrate natural and cultural resources protection into training goals and facility maintenance.

Environment and Cultural Background

The installation's natural and cultural environment is bounded on the west by a high ridge paralleling the Pacific coast. Rising sharply from rocky coastal shores, this ridge is one of a wooded and chaparral-blanketed system enveloping oak and grass-covered hills that roll onto margins of elongated river valleys. Eastward, and 1,000 to 1,500 feet in elevation below FHL, lies the fertile Salinas River valley.